

42: Schetelig--385-386

T-2

(no date) 1868

Formosans

116, 501, 503

The river system of the northern part of the island of Formosa has been put to most excellent use by the Chinese, so distinguished for their skill in canal building and irrigation. From Tamsui, in the conveniently fitted up river boats, the so-called rapid boats, one can easily make a whole day's journey into the interior in three directions: 1) on the so-called Kilung Canal to within half an hour of the town of Kilung; 2) on the Tamsui River, properly speaking, upstream to the southeast and 3) on the [386] southern arm region of the western slopes of the large Central Range.

I decided to visit Kilung first. On the journey thither by water we saw the now celebrated sulphur springs in the so-called Hell Valley. In addition to the plentiful sulphur springs, they have high pressure water vapor impregnated with SH, and also bring up a mass of clay similar to the contents of the mud volcanoes. From this the Chinese obtain large quantities of sulphur by simply boiling it off. The surroundings of the river become ever more beautiful once one has left the broader part of the lower Tamsui course and has passed through the so-called Manka Plain (Manka is the name of the chief town of the district of Tamsui-Ting). Gently rising and luxuriantly coated clay schist hills come down almost to the river bed, while in the distance picturesquely grouped and precipitous sandstone mountains offer a varied picture to the eye. But soon hard work is called for, for the rapids, which now occur in great numbers, can be passed only with difficulty and our crew stand up to their shoulders in water to shove the loaded vessel over the pebbles, while the traveler must also quite frequently jump out in order to lighten the boat and to help. Other boats sweep down past us at a great speed for the most part laden with hemp, indigo, potatoes or coal. On the seaward journey the force of the water does all that is necessary, and the skillful Chinese has equipped the boat only with a rudder at the back and, remarkably enough, in front also, in order to steer round the rocks without danger. Before coming to Kilung one crosses the watershed, a small height of some 200 to 300 feet, which sinks sharply towards Kilung and the sea.

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Kilung is a Chinese town with walls and gates. It is open to European commerce and is distinguished for the by no means inconsiderable beds of coal in the neighborhood and by the traces of a Spanish fort. For as, in the south near Taiwan-fu and in the north near Tamsui, quite substantial remains of Dutch strongholds are to be found, similarly the Spaniards, [387] during their brief period of settlement in the 17th century, seem to have made Kilung the chief point for their operations.

Above all else I desired to become acquainted with part of the west coast, so I hired a junk to transport all of us, with all our belongings, to the Caponlan Plain, the only piece of land suited for agriculture on the whole northeast coast. This plain stretches out for some miles from north to south and is everywhere dominated by steep and inaccessible sandstone cliffs some 2,000 to 3,000 feet high which form the last spurs of the Central Range. We remained for some days in this very fertile colony which, however, is cut off from the rest of the world.

The harbor of Sawo has been repeatedly visited by warships and on some occasions by trading vessels, generally only for passing protection against wind and weather or in order to survey the coast. The transport "Elbe," belonging to the Prussian fleet, was also there in 1860 (1). Shortly before us the "Sylvia" had left the harbor, this being

1. This is a mistake, committed also by Dr. Hermann Maron, Japan und China, Berlin 1863, Vol. II, p. 73. The "Elbe" touched only at the south and southwest coasts of Formosa, but the Prussian frigate "Thetis" was involved in an incident with Chinese pirate junks in the neighborhood of Sawo Bay (see Die preuss. Expedition nach Ost-Asien, Vol. II, 1866, pp. 112 ff.).

an English survey ship which, be it remarked in parenthesis, has just now finished the survey of the Formosan coast begun about one and one half years ago. This survey will considerably transform the shape of the west coast on the map.

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The harbor of Sawo is deep, in places 10 fathoms deep; It is protected on the south, west and north, but entry is rendered much more difficult by many sandstone rocks. The place itself appears to be hewn out of the rock, for on all sides the mountains sink precipitously into the sea, and even the small valley in which the village of Sawo is situated is only about 1/4 of a German mile long and much narrower. [388] Behind, in rapid succession, steep mountains rise up, the first chain already rising to a height of 2,000 feet.

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The population of Sawo, which is cut off from all communication by land with the rest of the island (except with the Caponlan Plain), is consequently made up of the dregs of the Chinese population. Since agriculture is impossible, they belong to a genus of seaman such as exists only in China, for on occasion they can transform themselves into pirates, shore robbers, camphor wood thieves or mandarin's soldiers, as required. Sawo is a place with an evil reputation even among the Chinese.... Shortly after we had arrived camphor agents landed and, although they were extremely polite to us on the surface, they nevertheless looked at us suspiciously for they thought that their secret trade might be unfavorably influenced by us. These persons then stirred up the inhabitants against us and spread the rumor that we were traveling in the interests of a foreign government, the Prussian Government, and they hampered us in all our movements. The web of intrigue that was thrown around us was extremely finely spun, and every day there were new troubles and new affronts; for the Chinese, when he is evil, observes the principle that evil must be profitable to him, or it is not worth the trouble. Finally, after they had tried in vain to starve us out, for we were well supplied, we had to forego water transportation. The boats and junks were hidden from us and we were compelled to travel by land over the ridge of hills to the north to the plain of Caponlan, since we could not leave behind the instruments, etc. Fortunately there were five of us and we were all armed, for among these rogues a single man would have perhaps had a hard time.

I had convinced myself personally, by means of several excursions, of the isolated position of Sawo and of the impossibility of finding any connection with the interior. One must picture the land as rising precipitously from here to the highest point on the island. The mountains, up which I went to a height of 3,000 feet, are covered with primeval forest, particularly with camphor wood. Like all mountains in northern Formosa they consist of graywacke and coal-bearing clay schist, and because of their great steepness they give use to quite insignificant but very cold streams.

Starting from Manka, the point common to the three chief arms of the Tamsui River, I undertook a second expedition up the middle river to the interior. Chintamki, i.e., "the way to the indigo fields," is a small locality at the bend of this river arm where the river changes its southwesterly course for a north-northeasterly one. Up to this point the boats are forced through the rapids at the cost of some exertion, but then the river must be abandoned and the march to the interior must be undertaken on the roughest mountain paths, close to precipices and with the constant danger of plunging into the depths, into the swirling streams below. The traveler is richly compensated for all his labors and his dangerous slips by a delightful journey through the most remote cultural areas of Chinese colonization. On the highest mountain passes, at 2,000 feet and more, year in and year out the camphor trees and tree ferns are uprooted and, untiringly, Convolvulus edulis, the sweet potato, and the profitable indigo are planted; and although every summer terrific downfalls wash away the delicate plants from the very steep cliff walls, the industrious Chinese is not discouraged by the necessity of repeating his work.... It is clear at the first glance that there, along the upper course of the Tamsui River, the world of the primeval forest and the former haunts of the natives are disappearing more and more beneath the axe of the woodcutter. People who took the same path 5 or 6 years ago, in order to investigate the interior, still found primeval forest and natives living their undisturbed and unchanged lives in places where today

there are flourishing Chinese villages. The valley in which lies the village of Takau (this should not be confused with the port of the same name in the district of Fung-schan on the southwest coast), the terminus for our bearers and our assembly point, seems to have been taken in hand during the last few years only, for everywhere charred tree stumps may still be seen between the indigo plants. This valley is reached via a pass more than 2,000 feet high, and one is surprised by the sight of the upper course of the river tumbling and winding in the depths below, and also by the view of the mountain chains, uncountable as they stretch out to the south. Our aim was soon reached, namely to determine the situation of this upper valley and to survey and to measure the mountain ranges round about.

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So, while it is possible to get to know the land in its original form on a journey up the middle course of the Tamsui River... a journey up the southern arm gives one a view of the old, original colonial system of the Chinese on Formosa. First we travel along the road from Tamsui to the southern locality of Taiwanfu, consequently covering well trodden ground. But this region of the western plain was the first that the Chinese developed, after the occupation 200 years ago and, accordingly, it is here that we found Chinese law and Chinese customs in their greatest purity. Worthy of note, at the same time, are the number of Chinese dialects and consequently of Chinese provinces that are represented here. Here the Fokien Chinese live in colonies beside their sworn enemy, the Hakka, from the province of Kwangtiang, and the Hoklo, the sugar-cane cultivator of Swatau, while between them all, hated by all and getting the better of them all, there wanders the sly Cantonese, the merchant, scribe, land owner or camphor agent. We kept on our way in the old fashion and did not unload our baggage until the boats sat motionless on the stone rubble of the rapids. This happened near the old fortress of Tokscham, the possession of a wealthy and influential Chinese family which has been in residence here since the earliest period of Chinese colonization.

Formosa was not colonized by the government. The Chinese were, and are, too practical not to know the drawbacks of state interference in colonization in all its extent, and both on the mainland and here in Formosa [391] they have taken good care not to transfer the center of gravity of the Empire to the outside. Consequently... northern and western Formosa must be looked on as a colony of squatters who, however, in the course of the years, have received titles and documents from the mandarins for the land which they had often acquired by the sword. All this was done by means of contracts and compromise, and so it comes about that today, in the midst of a population already numbering millions, and who immigrated comparatively recently, we find a number of old families who, having lived here for centuries, have developed a power that far exceeds that of the Imperial officials, due to the great forces that the possession of land has always put at their disposal. But it is clear that these various parties lend each other support in view of the chaotic condition of a population that has come together from the most varied provinces of the Empire, and in view of the need of exploiting the camphor forests in their own interests both against the Europeans outside the country and the mountain-dwelling natives within. The rich and independent settler of long standing supported the mandarin in maintaining and extending Imperial rights, at least insofar as he himself was not included in them, and on the other hand the mandarin has always been intelligent enough to respect the traditional rights of such an independent leader,

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exacti~~ng~~ no transport tax for his merchandise and not even hampering him in his destructive war against the extensive camphor woods, although otherwise every infringement of the law concerning the sacredness of the camphor monopoly is looked on as a kind of high treason directed against the Crown.

In one house of this kind in Tokscham, the fortress of an old and immensely wealthy leader, we met with the greatest hospitality that it is possible to show strangers, and from here we made excursions to the camphor forests of the interior as well as up the extremely curious river valley to the south.

Here it is still possible to trace the successive stages that distinguish the history of the formation of the river. On either side the river is surrounded by a plateau some 600 to 700 feet high, and from this various terraces go down to the river itself and show, even today, that formerly the bed must have been extremely broad and deep, though now the water, which the Chinese lead away on all sides to their fields, is rarely more than a few feet above the point of lowest water level, as we found it [392]. So large does the area of evaporation of a once swift and deep stream become owing to the efforts made in cultivating fields and maintaining meadows.

The following brief remarks will be made concerning the distribution of heights and plains in the north of Formosa. I have shown that within one day it is possible, from the meeting point of the three chief streams in the Manka Plain, to reach the foot of the mountains in almost every direction. A further day's journey brings one right into the mountains, but generally one is still within the frontiers where Chinese colonists are to be found, and then, after crossing the first and second ridges, one enters the primeval forests. If one considers that, from our observation point near Takau in the middle of the northernmost third of the island and on the upper course of the Tamsui River, 400 feet above sea level, the nearest ranges are 200 to 300 feet high, that from there in a southerly direction mountains up to 5,000 feet high were measured by us and, finally, that the central connecting point of the Central Range, formerly thought to be 12,000 feet, is now known to be more than 13,000 feet with the surveying of Mount Sylvia, and that this highest point on the island is only 2 to 3 miles to the south; considering all this, it becomes clear that everything lying in between must be mountainous, and steep at that, with no tablelands or cultivated plateaus. Yet all the land lying to the north of the lower course of the middle stream, or that which is situated round the Kilung River, is of surprising fertility, as is also the already mentioned Manka Plain which, strangely enough, is irrigated not by the Tamsui River itself but by one of those admirable Chinese artificial systems of irrigation that brings the water from distant mountains.

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Among the products of the country I mention those of special interest for Europeans; coal, camphor and sulphur, for indigo and hemp are sent to the Chinese market only. No great quantities of sulphur are found, but more could be obtained nevertheless by the improvement of the methods used. Camphor alone makes a treasure chamber of the island of Formosa. It is known that the Laurus camphora is found only in Japan and Formosa, and there only in some districts. Since only trees of a particular age can be used for obtaining the valuable resin, and since every time, unfortunately, the whole tree with trunk and branches is thrown into the subliming pot, one can foresee a time when camphor will go up in price in geometric progression [393] and when finally production will become so small that not even Germany alone can be provided with it. This matter of camphor production seems to me to be of no means inconsiderable economic importance...

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Coal is found everywhere in narrow beds that are almost always horizontal and lie between graywack and clay schist. It is not of the first quality and is of light specific gravity, but when mixed with English or Australian coal it provides a fairly satisfactory fuel. Of the galleries I visited, some were 600 paces long before one reached dimensions of 6 to 7 feet vertically and 20 to 40 feet horizontally. Statements have also been made about precious metals that are said to occur in Formosa. I myself have seen nothing of the kind, but before all else I wish to stress the fact that the value of precious metals does not depend on their inherent worth alone, but on the location and the surroundings.